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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO

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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

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UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 001243

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DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA, AND INR/B
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT LOSES ANTANANARIVO

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 1231

B) ANTANANARIVO 1063

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Unofficial results from the December 12 municipal elections show the ruling TIM Party of President Marc Ravalomanana faring well throughout the country, with the notable exception of a humiliating upset in the capital of Antananarivo. Andry "TGV" Rajoelina, a successful businessman but political unknown, appears to have won a landslide victory against the TIM incumbent Hery Rafalimanana. The public is calling Rajoelina's win a vote of protest against cost of living and power outage problems in the capital, and hopes it will serve as an "alert" to the President that changes are in order throughout the country. In general, the elections took place peacefully with minor irregularities surrounding voter registration lists and voter cards. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) While it is too soon to tell just how well TIM fared throughout the country, the first unofficial results show TIM leading in major regional cities. Voter participation, estimated to fall between 25 and 30 percent throughout most of the country, was noticeably higher in Antananarivo with an estimated 40 to 50 percent showing up at the polls - approximately double the urban turnout of the September 23 National Assembly elections (Ref B).

¶3. (SBU) Unofficial results show the independent Andry Rajoelina sweeping the polls in Antananarivo with approximately 62 percent of the vote; Embassy staff, observing at seven polling stations throughout the city, confirm these estimates. That the President's party lost in his hometown, indeed even in his own polling station, and on his 58th birthday, is a humiliating upset. The President had attached enormous importance to these elections, even skipping the Europe-Africa Summit in Lisbon in order to campaign. In the President's privately owned newspaper, "political observers" - likely the newspaper editors themselves - opined that Antananarivo residents showed they are not yet ready for development by issuing a "kamikaze vote" for a stranger over a candidate who has demonstrated concrete achievements. It remains to be seen whether there will be professional repercussions against long-time Foreign Minister Marcel Ranjeva, who had been placed in charge of mobilizing TIM voters in the capital city. In the past, Ravalomanana has exacted a professional price in cases where his political operatives did not deliver.

¶4. (U) Election Day proceeded smoothly with reports of minor irregularities surrounding voter registration lists and voter cards. At one Antananarivo polling station, 25 envelopes were found pre-stuffed with TIM ballots. Although Andry Rajoelina had complained preceding the elections that the Government of Madagascar (GOM) manipulated voter lists to TIM's advantage and failed to hand over the voter list and number of voting stations, his camp will not be filing a formal complaint after his landslide win. In their

view, the most important issue at this point is the smooth transition of power.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Andry Rajoelina's win in Antananarivo appears largely a vote of protest against the cost of living, constant power outages, and lack of infrastructure, all of which TIM has not been able to address. Also, the TIM incumbent was a pure Ravalomanana creation - another "Tiko Boy" anointed by his former boss - which also engendered voter resentment. In addition, the 37-year-old Rajoelina - who looks far younger -- mobilized a youthful voter base through his energetic campaign. Finally, it may be seen as a vote for greater democracy in Madagascar following the monolithic victory of TIM in the National Assembly elections (Ref B). Speakers on radio call-in programs expressed the hope this election would be a "lesson" to the GOM that it ought to think seriously about changing its priorities and allow Rajoelina to do his work as the new mayor. President Ravalomanana could head off opposition efforts to exploit his loss by working with Andry Rajoelina, who was careful to couch his role as "an alternative, not an opponent." However, neither the president nor the GOM has yet reacted publicly to the upset. It is too early to assess the country-wide impact of TIM's loss of Antananarivo, but this may well serve as an "alert" to the President. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT